



BEATING THE HOLIDAY BLUES

The realization may come with the first snowfall, or perhaps with the sudden appearance of pumpkin pie and candy canes at the grocery store. However it first dawns on you, it's inescapable: the holiday season is upon us.

The holidays are traditionally depicted as a time of constant celebration and good cheer, but for many of us the season has both ups and downs. Holiday obligations can make a stressful schedule even more so, for example, and the pressure to spend can worsen financial anxieties. Loneliness and relationship problems often seem magnified, and family conflicts we do our best to avoid for most of the year may be reignited during holiday visits.

TAKE IT EASY

If you have negative feelings during the holidays – whether you experience lingering sadness, anxiety or full-blown depression – you are not alone. These suggestions can help you maintain your emotional balance throughout the holiday season:

- » ***Don't try to control your family members.*** Make an effort to accept the quirks and idiosyncrasies that have annoyed you in the past. Avoid the temptation to preach to family members about their life choices. And if they preach to you, thank them graciously and change the subject.
- » ***Set reasonable expectations.*** Don't compare yourself and your family with the fictional depictions you see on TV. Accept your family members for who they are, expect that things will sometimes go wrong and be gentle with yourself and others. Change is natural: rather than romanticizing the past, celebrate the joys and challenges of the present.
- » ***Break the materialistic cycle.*** Holiday spirit is not about buying the most lavish or expensive presents. Don't judge the value of a gift by its price. Give from the heart, and your gift will always be welcome.
- » ***Make room for your emotions.*** Don't buy into the cultural myth that everyone is happy all the time throughout the holiday season. Allow yourself to experience your full range of natural emotions. If you have recently lost or been separated from someone, give yourself the emotional space you need and accept your feelings of loss or emptiness.

CHANGE YOUR APPROACH TO HOLIDAY STRESS

If the stress of holiday responsibilities feels overwhelming, try changing your approach. Here are some strategies:

- » ***Manage your time and resources effectively.*** Plan your time in advance, and do not try to accomplish more than you reasonably can.
- » ***Pick and choose your holiday activities.*** You don't need to do all your routine holiday activities just because you always have. If you're overwhelmed by the mad flurry of preparations and events, consider letting some of them go.
- » ***Get an early start, and slow down.*** If you tend to put off the holiday shopping, wrapping, planning and decorating until the week before the holiday, try starting a month earlier. That way, you will be able to do all of it at a more leisurely and less stressful pace.

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Remember: As an MHN member, you have access to a full spectrum of telephonic consultations and other EAP services (see sidebar) that can help you organize your time as well as identify and cope with behavioral health challenges. Assistance is available all day, every day (including all holidays!).

This article is for informational and self-help purposes only. It should not be treated as a substitute for legal or financial advice, or as a substitute for consultation with a qualified professional.

ARE THE HOLIDAY BLUES GETTING TO YOU?

The holiday season is a busy and challenging time, and for many people stress and depression surface. Your EAP can help:

- » MHN's Online Member Services (OMS) include an easy-to-use, interactive **assessment tool** that can help you evaluate symptoms of depression, as well as an online self-help program to help you manage depression.
- » OMS also delivers articles, quick tips and information sheets on a wide range of issues related to emotional health.
- » MHN provides a broad range of daily living services, including referrals for errand and chore services, event and party planning resources, and gift and personal shopping solutions.
- » Our network of behavioral health clinicians can help you cope with emotional health problems such as stress, anxiety, grief and loss, depression and relationship issues.

**For more information, call
(866) EAP-4SOC
(866) 327-4762**

TDD callers, please dial (800) 327-0801

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